# 'A disappearing race before we came here'

## DOCTOR ALFRED KINGCOME NEWMAN, THE DYING MAORI, AND VICTORIAN SCIENTIFIC RACISM[1]

IN JANUARY 1882 Alfred Kingcome Newman, a physician, businessman, and ex-president of the Wellington Philosophical Society, read a long paper to that body entitled 'A Study of the Causes leading to the Extinction of the Maori'. Intent on taking a rigorously scientific approach to the study of the human species, Newman characterized his study as an 'investigation' that relied on 'fact', 'statistics', and 'evidence'. The audience, composed of professional scientists, politicians, businessmen, physicians, lawyers, and clergy, listened attentively.[2]

Estimates of the pre-1840 Maori population made by European explorers, naturalists, travellers, and missionaries constituted 'a mass of evidence which there is no denying', Newman began. Around the beginning of the nineteenth century there existed somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 Maori. Yet the 1881 census recorded only about 44,000. These statistics provided 'every intelligent observer' with 'ample proof' of the 'astonishingly rapid disappearance' of the Maori race.

Maori decline, Newman alleged, constituted part of a wider pattern. He cited European estimates of falling indigenous populations in Hawaii, the Marquesas, Tahiti, Fiji, and other islands to prove that 'all over the Pacific' the 'Malay family', to which he believed the Maori belonged, was 'steadily dying out'. On the basis of such 'abundant, clear and indisputable' evidence he argued that these races were coming to the end of their life cycles. Each race, like every individual human being, Newman declared, 'has its birth, its maturity, begets fresh races or individuals, and then slowly or rapidly decays'. None could avoid extinction; races 'die out just as certainly as do individuals'.

What particular causes were hurtling Maori toward oblivion? Previous commentators had usually allotted some, sometimes most, of the blame to the incoming Europeans. Newman categorically rejected what later historians

1 I would like to thank Tony Ballantyne, Barbara Brookes, Kerry Howe, Brian Moloughney, Erik Olssen, David Thomson, and an anonymous referee for their comments on earlier drafts of this article.

2 Alfred K. Newman, 'A Study of the Causes leading to the Extinction of the Maori', *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* (TPNZI), 1882, XV, pp.459-77. This may be regarded as a general reference for the following discussion and quotations, unless otherwise noted.

would call the fatal impact thesis. The race was dying out before Pakeha set foot in New Zealand, he insisted. The causes lay within Maori society. Newman constructed a hellish picture of pre-contact culture based, it must be said, on plenty of assertion but little evidence. 'Many' Maori fell victim to 'cannibalism'. The killing of infants and old people was 'very common', suicide 'exceedingly common', and murders 'numerous'. Maori 'died frequently from slight wounds' because they lacked medical knowledge. During times of warfare or famine 'the old women were killed'. Deadly diseases — consumption, diarrhoea, bronchitis, pneumonia, rheumatism, and scrofula — decimated the population. It declined still further as a result of inbreeding, which produced 'sterility' and 'barrenness'.

Unhealthy living conditions made matters worse. In recent years Maori had left their 'sunny and airy' pa to live 'at the edge of a bush or swamp' in 'low-lying, damp, ill-drained spots'. They could hardly have chosen 'worse or more unhealthy sites for their dwellings'. Respiratory diseases, especially consumption, began to take hold. Because Maori knew 'nothing' of 'care, medicine, nursing' or 'change of climate', and slept together in the 'close fetid air' of 'tiny' and 'unventilated' *whare*, healthy individuals, exposed to the 'unhealthy breaths' of consumptives, soon caught the disease.

What impact did the coming of the Pakeha have on the Maori population? Newman argued inconsistently on this issue. He initially characterized 'imported diseases', such as influenza, measles, scarlet fever, diphtheria, typhoid, syphilis, and leprosy, as 'very powerful agents' of depopulation. Later he modified that position; such diseases had 'not been the chief causes' of decline. By the end of the paper he minimized their impact altogether: introduced diseases had contributed 'only in a small degree'.

His discussion of venereal diseases typified this section of the paper. He condemned 'observers not trained in medicine', by whom he meant missionaries, who, in Newman's view, had exaggerated the impact of such diseases out of all proportion. Such persons talked of 'the frightful effects of that "awful scourge" syphilis' and attributed 'fearful effects' to it. But Newman had made 'special inquiries from doctors' — the 'only class of men whose opinion is worth taking' — who confirmed Newman's 'astonishment at the smallness of the evil'. He himself had treated a 'large number' of Maori, but had been unable 'to detect any evils' resulting from syphilis. His refusal to accept the seriousness of syphilis seems to have been largely wishful thinking; as he himself acknowledged, contemporary observers, trained physicians such as A.S. Thomson as well as missionaries, acknowledged the seriousness of venereal diseases, a view that the most reliable modern studies support. According to Alfred Crosby, 'nothing outdid tuberculosis and venereal disease as enemies of the Maori'.[3]

Throughout the paper Newman represented the Pakeha not as a pestilential destroyer of Maori society but as a benefactor, bringing to Maori the horn of plenty — colonists constructed images of themselves as well as of Maori. The

3 Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, Cambridge, 1986, p.242.

English offered modern science and medicine, said Newman, as well as an 'abundance of easily-got food . . . infinitely more nutritious' than the traditional Maori diet. Meat, wheat, oats, and potatoes contained 'far more nutriment' than 'treble or quadruple the quantity of shell-fish', fern-root, or convolvulus-root. Yet the ill-starred Maori turned even Pakeha blessings into curses. This remarkable new diet produced in young Maori women, who ate a lot and exercised little, 'a state of fatness and general plethora' which led, 'as in all the lower animals', to 'lessened fertility' and, in some cases, 'absolute sterility'.

Perhaps interbreeding with 'the more vigorous fertile white race' would save the dying Maori? No, said Newman. Although half-castes often possessed 'handsome figures and broad shoulders' they also had 'shallow' chests, which made them prone to consumption. 'All die young.' The offspring of half-castes constituted a more 'feeble race' still, heading 'rapidly' for 'extinction.' Newman cited personal observations to support these assertions.

All this evidence, Newman argued, proved that the 'effete' and 'worn out' Maori was heading for extinction 'before we came here'. His conclusion rings down the years as the epitome of Victorian racial arrogance: 'The disappearance of the race is scarcely subject for much regret. They are dying out in a quick, easy way and are being supplanted by a superior race.'

This paper constitutes Newman's chief claim to fame and the attention of posterity. Historians have quoted its callous conclusion from that day until this to illustrate the scientific racism of Victorian Pakeha.[4] According to James Belich, for example, Newman was saying what 'many others thought' about Maori, articulating the 'Social Darwinism' which became 'quite prevalent' in Pakeha culture between 1870 and 1900. Malcolm Nicholson describes 'A Study of the Causes' as 'the most detailed medical justification of the settlers' position' ever offered, an attempt to deploy the 'full authority of modern medical science' in the service of 'European dominance'.[5]

'A Study of the Causes' does indeed illustrate one way in which racism reared its head in colonial culture. Throughout the text Newman represented the Maori as a diseased, depraved, and dying Other, over against whom vigorous, virtuous, and virile John Bull defined himself. Medical science, it would appear, by locating the causes of extinction within Maori society, both rationalized the Pakeha takeover and absolved the invader of guilt. This text seems perfectly to exemplify the contention of Edward Said that no aspect of Victorian culture escaped the dark taint of imperialism.[6] If Newman spoke for science, no wonder

4 See for example Te Rangi Hiroa (Peter Buck), 'The Passing of the Maori', TPNZI, 1924, LVII, pp.363-75; I.L.G. Sutherland, *The Maori People Today: A General Survey*, Wellington, 1940, p.28; Angela Ballara, *Proud To Be White? A Survey of Pakeha Prejudice in New Zealand*, Auckland, 1986, p.83; D. Ian Pool, *Te Iwi Maori: A New Zealand Population, Past, Present, and Projected*, Auckland, 1991, p.67.

5 James Belich, *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict*, Auckland, 1986, p.299; Malcolm Nicolson, 'Medicine and racial politics: changing images of the New Zealand Maori in the nineteenth century', in David Arnold, ed., *Imperial Medicine and Indigenous Societies*, Manchester, 1988, p.88.

6 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, London, 1993, passim.

religious believers throughout the country expressed horror at the dawning of a ruthless, godless, post-Darwinian world.

But did Newman speak for science? Although his notorious paper has been endlessly quoted by historians, none, to my knowledge, has told us anything more about him, nor set this paper in the context of Newman's life and thought or in the wider context of colonial science. I do so here by posing a series of questions. How representative were Newman's views? Was he a typical colonial man of science, or a more marginal figure? How did members of the Wellington Philosophical Society respond to this paper? Did Newman advocate systematically inhumane racial policies during his long career in the House of Representatives?

When we answer these questions a more accurate picture of Newman emerges. Belich and Nicholson, I argue, have mistaken an extreme view for a mainstream one. Far from receiving universal assent, 'A Study of the Causes' received a hostile reception in the Wellington Philosophical Society, most notably from Sir James Hector, probably the dominant figure in New Zealand science in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, as we shall see, this was not the first time that leading scientists had shot Newman's arguments down in flames. Finally, as his political career illustrates, the racism expressed in 'A Study of the Causes' can hardly be considered typical even of Newman himself. This case study, I conclude, illustrates the danger of reading texts apart from contexts.

We begin with Newman's family background. Alfred Kingcome Newman was born at Madras, India, on 27 April 1849 to Captain Alfred Newman, a distinguished ex-Indian Navy officer who commanded an East India Company ship, and Isabella, née Soames.[7] The family emigrated to New Zealand in 1853, farming the thirteen thousand-acre Arlington estate near Waipukurau, and becoming prominent and prosperous members of the local community.[8] Captain Newman, renowned for his fiery temper, clashed with local Maori when his stock strayed repeatedly on to reserve land at Eparaima. He eventually died of cirrhosis of the liver in 1882. Young Alfred reacted against much in his father's life; as an adult he became an ardent prohibitionist and abandoned Christianity.[9]

Newman attended private schools in Hawke's Bay and Auckland before travelling to England to complete his secondary schooling at Bath in 1863. He studied medicine at Guy's Hospital, London, practising as a house surgeon and qualifying MRCS and LRCP, before completing MB and CM degrees at Aberdeen University. These years, during which Newman attended meetings of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, exposed him to the intellectual controversies agitating Britain and Europe.[10] He returned to New

7 Birth Certificate: Alfred Kingcome Newman (copy in author's possession). For a useful biographical study of Newman see Shaun Broadley, 'Science, Race and Politics: An Intellectual Biography of A.K. Newman', Postgraduate Diploma in History Dissertation, Otago University, 1994.

8 Miriam Macgregor, *Early Stations of Hawkes Bay*, Wellington, 1970, pp. 20-21.

9 *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates* (NZPD), 1912, CLIX, p.282.

10 Newman mentioned attending the 1875 meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 'Speculations on the Physiological Changes Obtaining in the English Race when Transplanted to New Zealand', TPNZI, 1876, IX, pp.37-44, 42.

Zealand in 1875 a convinced evolutionist and an admirer of Charles Darwin, T.H. Huxley, and the Irish physicist John Tyndall. The latter two in particular wielded evolution as a weapon to wrest from the Anglican establishment leadership and control not just of British science but of education and culture. The movement they spearheaded, which the American historian F.M. Turner has called Victorian scientific naturalism, found its way to the antipodes in the persons of men such as Newman, A.W. Bickerton, professor of chemistry at Canterbury College, and T.J. Parker, professor of biology at the University of Otago.[11] Although Newman never attained the scientific eminence of the latter two, he believed, echoing Huxley, that only 'close empirical investigation' of natural phenomena had granted humankind 'real knowledge'. He condemned 'clever metaphysicians' who indulged in idle speculation and wordplay, as well as religious believers who, in his view, had constantly obstructed scientific investigation. One of the few philosophical materialists in Victorian New Zealand, he believed that reality consisted exclusively of force and matter.[12] Newman had probably acquired this outlook in Britain: evolutionary materialism, envisaging the ascent of life from below, had been circulating in radical London medical circles since the 1820s, as a counterblast to the Christian creationism of the Anglican establishment.[13]

Newman joined the Wellington Philosophical Society soon after his return from Britain. This body had been established in 1868 as one of a network of similar institutions in the provinces, all affiliated to the New Zealand Institute, and devoted to the advancement of science, literature, and the arts. Members gathered at monthly meetings to discuss papers on literary, philosophical, and scientific topics, though, in a pragmatic colonial culture, science predominated.

Newman, aged just 27, bristling with medical degrees and ambition, read his first paper entitled 'Speculations on the Physiological Changes Obtaining in the English Race when Transplanted to New Zealand' to the Wellington Philosophical Society in September 1876. This paper illustrates both Newman's penchant for biological determinism and his marginal status within the colonial scientific community.

The New Zealand environment damaged the 'English race', Newman declared. The colony's low barometric pressure, and warm and sunny climate, produced 'hot-house flowers', young adults who grew rapidly but soon faded to become 'physically and mentally weaker' than their British counterparts. If not for a constant stream of healthy immigrants from Home, the English race would 'very decidedly deteriorate' in New Zealand, he warned, contrary to the naive

11 F.M. Turner, 'The Victorian Conflict between Science and Religion: A Professional Dimension', in F.M. Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority: Essays in Victorian Intellectual Life*, Cambridge, 1993, pp.171-200.

12 A.K. Newman, 'The Approaching Birth of a Nation in Australasia', *Monthly Review*, 1890, II, pp.6-14, 6; A.K. Newman, 'The Brain in Relation to the Mind', *New Zealand Times*, 7 July 1879, p.3.

13 Adrian Desmond, *The Politics of Evolution: Morphology, Medicine, and Reform in Radical London*, Chicago, 1989.

belief of 'old colonists' in the superiority of the local environment.[14]

Assessing the impact of the chemistry of New Zealand soils on the colonial mind, Newman quoted the continental medical materialist Jakob Moleschott: 'no thought without phosphorous'. This phrase, which apparently denied the existence of an immaterial mind or soul separate from the brain, had horrified Christian Europe.[15] If local soils lacked phosphorous, Newman continued, then the English immigrant, eating a phosphorous-deficient diet, would lack 'brain power'. Because 'national greatness' depended on 'brain power', New Zealand would almost certainly succumb to a phosphorous-rich competitor in the 'fierce struggle for existence between nations'.

Throughout the paper Newman tried to dazzle his audience with science. He dropped the names of eminent British and European scientists, such as 'Professor Tyndall', the 'great geologist Lyell', and 'learned pathologists'. He used numbers and statistics to create an impression of mathematical precision. And he appealed to empirical evidence in an attempt to make his case appear convincing, citing an 'immense mass of barometric readings', for example, to support his contentions about the significance of air pressure on human physiology.

At one level, the paper constituted a scientific argument. Simultaneously it constituted an assertion of cultural authority. If the future of the nation depended on these vital links between environment and human physiology, if national security hinged on soil chemistry, then a scientifically-trained medical man such as Newman became a crucial figure, whose knowledge could shape the nation's destiny. 'Speculations on the Physiological Character of the English Race' should thus be read as an attempt to promote the cultural authority of science, and of Newman himself.

One final point is worth noting. As this paper illustrates, Newman applied his biological determinism even-handedly, to white as well as non-white races. 'Speculations' predicted the inexorable decay of the 'English race' in New Zealand six years before Newman predicted Maori decay in 'A Study of the Causes'. Furthermore, the latter paper, which asserted that human races followed preordained cycles of birth, growth, maturity and death, did not shrink from concluding that eventually 'all the existing races', including the currently 'flourishing' European, would 'die out'.[16] Newman applied his racial determinism in a more even-handed, colour-blind fashion than historians have acknowledged.

Unfortunately for bustling young Newman, older, established members of the Wellington Philosophical Society were distinctly unimpressed by his first foray into colonial science. William Travers, a botanist esteemed by such leading British scientists as Sir Charles Lyell and J.D. Hooker, and author of numerous articles in the *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute*,

14 Newman, 'Speculations', passim. This may be regarded as a general reference for the following discussion, unless otherwise noted.

15 O. Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, 1975, pp.165-75.

16 Newman, 'A Study of the Causes', p.464.

retorted that New Zealand explorers and miners, exposed directly and for long periods to the allegedly debilitating colonial environment, in fact demonstrated great endurance and vigour, which undermined Newman's theory of colonial deterioration. Travers also criticized the idea that soil phosphate concentrations directly affected human brain-power, suggesting that Newman 'should have produced facts in support of such sweeping statements'. Captain Gilbert Mair, a surveyor and soldier well acquainted with Maori, suggested that if Newman was right, then Maori, who had been exposed to the supposedly unhealthy colonial environment much longer than any Pakeha, should have suffered because of it. Yet the average height and weight of Maori men quite equalled that of English-born immigrants. Sir James Hector, a Scottish-trained physician, director of the Geological Survey and Colonial Museum, and Fellow of the Royal Society of London, argued that the New Zealand death rate, at 16 per thousand, lay significantly below that of Britain at 22 per thousand, which falsified Newman's argument that the English race deteriorated in New Zealand. A year later Charles Rous Marten, another member of the Wellington Philosophical Society, laid the deterioration theory finally to rest by showing that the barometric data on which Newman had relied were inaccurate.[17]

As this incident suggests, Newman, like many other members of the provincial scientific societies, dabbled in science only in his spare time. When ambition outran knowledge, as in 1876, he found himself in hot water. Although his medical education gave him a better background than some, he cannot be considered a first-rank professional scientist. In fact he did not even make medicine his career. He sought his fortune in business, in 1878 becoming a partner in Zohrab, Newman and Company, general merchants, and joining the Wellington Chamber of Commerce in 1879. In the same year he married Octavia Featherston, daughter of Isaac Featherston, a prominent Wellington and colonial politician, at Thorndon, Wellington.[18] This marriage undoubtedly helped Newman's political career as well as his bank account.[19] Later, in 1886, he became a lifelong shareholder and director of the Gear Meat Packing and Freezing Company.[20]

Newman returned to the Wellington Philosophical Society in 1877 to describe recent studies of the tuatara by leading British anatomists such as Huxley and Richard Owen. He outlined the animal's physiology and anatomy on the basis of his own dissections. This paper, modest in aim and straightforwardly empirical, aroused no controversy, and may have helped somewhat to restore its author's reputation.[21] Members elected him president of the society in 1879,

17 For the criticisms by Travers, Mair, Hector and others see TPNZI, 1876, IX, pp.618-20; C.R. Marten, 'The Comparative Atmospheric Pressure of Great Britain and New Zealand (considered in reference to Dr. Newman's theory of physical deterioration)', TPNZI, 1877, X, pp.212-17.

18 Marriage Certificate: Alfred Kingcome Newman and Octavia Featherston (copy in author's possession).

19 Return of Freeholders of New Zealand, 1882, 1889.

20 F.L. Irvine-Smith, *The Streets of My City*, Wellington, 1948, pp.163-4, 283; *The Cyclopaedia of New Zealand, volume I, Wellington Provincial District*, Wellington, 1892, p.262.

21 A.K. Newman, 'Notes on the Physiology and Anatomy of the Tuatara', TPNZI, 1877, X, pp.222-39.

though we should not read too much into this honour. During the 1870s and 1880s the societies often elected local worthies — judges, politicians, bishops, and doctors — who had standing in the community but not necessarily any great expertise in science. Only in the 1890s and later, as the scientific community professionalized, did trained scientists with specialist qualifications begin to dominate office-holding.

As president, Newman delivered a popular lecture entitled 'The Brain in Relation to the Mind' to a 'very large' audience, almost half of whom were women, in the Colonial Museum in Wellington in July 1879. This paper is worth examining, because it provides a comprehensive exposition of his meritocratic worldview and useful background to his political career.[22]

Presenting himself as a careful empiricist, Newman declared that he 'did not intend going into metaphysics'. He then proceeded, apparently unconscious of any inconsistency, to articulate speculative materialism throughout the rest of the lecture. The mind constituted a mere epiphenomenon of the brain, he declared. Everything was 'a question of brain'; brain size determined intellectual capacity, which determined the 'position in the civilized world' of nations, races, genders, and individuals.

Newman laid down as his 'broad rule' that 'the bigger and heavier' the brain, the 'stronger and more capable-minded' the owner. The brain of the 'ordinary educated Englishman', for example, weighed about three pounds. Women's brains were 'smaller' and, on average, five ounces lighter. In Newman's view this disproved the assertion of John Stuart Mill 'and other enthusiastic devotees of women's rights' that the female mind equalled the male mind.

Brain size also determined the success of nations and races in the struggle for existence. Appealing to the authority of the 'celebrated German anthropologist' Carl Vogt, a radical materialist who regarded human races as separate species, Newman argued that the 'big-brained Englishman' stood atop the racial hierarchy, with French and Germans 'running close up'. The light-brained 'Australians and South Sea Islanders' occupied the bottom rank, closest to the ape.

Individuals, as well as genders and races, found their station in life according to brain size. Newman criticized the belief that education and hard work would turn ordinary children into geniuses. This 'popular error' encouraged parents to force their 'little wretches to work, work, work'. But a child with a 'small brain' could never have a 'great mind'.

Up to this point Newman sounded like a rigid biological determinist, for whom brain size was destiny. In order to accommodate Victorian values of hard work and self-improvement, and to make his theory acceptable to the moderate-brained majority, he softened his determinism somewhat. The brain, like the muscles, might be trained to work better. He cited the example of George Grote, the English historian of ancient Greece, who possessed a 'small, feminine brain' weighing only 44 ounces. Yet Grote had trained it so well that he could 'outdo

22 A full report, on which the following discussion is based, appears in *New Zealand Times*, 7 July 1879, p.3, which may be regarded as a general reference for the following discussion, unless otherwise noted.

most 54 ounce men'. Newman concluded by offering advice on child-rearing to the many parents in his audience. They must train the brains as well as the bodies of their offspring, he declared. Mental exercise combined with plenty of gymnastics would carry their children 'triumphantly through' to 'professional success' over any 'narrow-chested, dyspeptic rival' in the battle of life. The only evidence of audience reaction to this lecture comes from James Hector, who had published previous popular lectures in the *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute*.[23] He did not publish this one.

Having examined Newman's attempts to make a name for himself in colonial science prior to 1882, we turn now to 'A Study of the Causes leading to Maori Extinction'. Borrowing George Stocking's concept of multiple contextualization, I argue that the text may best be understood when situated in a variety of contexts: economic, political, religious, and scientific.[24] The first three suggest why Newman articulated such crude racism. The last undermines previous interpretations of the paper.

The economic context constitutes the place to start. Newman had begun earning his living as a businessman in 1878, just before the long depression, which lasted into the 1890s and sent the colonial economy into a tailspin. Thinking big, Newman advocated rapid economic development as the solution. The government must end borrowing, cut imports, and boost exports, he told the Wellington Working Men's Club in 1881. Rapid development of new industries, like fishing, timber, pulp and paper, and the systematic exploitation of all local resources constituted the way out of the slump. New products produced in new industries should be sold to new markets. Why not clarify butter into ghee and export it to populous 'Hindostan'?[25]

One large obstacle stood in the way of this solution to the country's woes however — Maori landholding. Although Maori had sold or leased substantial areas of land, and the government had confiscated more during the wars of the 1860s, they still owned substantial areas, especially in the North Island, and had become increasingly unwilling to part with any more. Newman explained the problem as he saw it in 1892. Millions of acres of Maori land were lying 'as idle and useless to us as if they were not in New Zealand at all'. Yet if the 'death' of the Maori was indeed occurring in 'astonishingly rapid' fashion, as he argued in 'A Study of the Causes', then this impediment to the rapid and systematic exploitation of all the colony's resources was removed, in theory if not yet in actuality. If Maori faced 'utter effacement', then common sense suggested that Pakeha should take over and develop the country's resources. No sense in leaving the land and its treasures to a people 'hurrying . . . to their graves'.[26]

23 See for example W.T.L. Travers' popular lecture 'On the Changes Effected in the Natural Features of a New Country by the Introduction of Civilized Races', TPNZI, 1869, II, pp.299-313.

24 George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, New York, 1987, passim.

25 Alfred K. Newman, *On the Development of Some of the Resources of New Zealand, and the Attendant Results. A Lecture to the Working Men's Club, Wellington, 12 January, 1881*, Wellington, 1881, passim.

26 NZPD, 1892, LXXVIII, p.299; Newman, 'A Study of the Causes', pp.461, 476.

Pakeha prosperity, Newman's business interests, and his own pocket benefited by the transfer of land from the 'disappearing' Maori to the 'more vigorous' Pakeha. Newman profited handsomely from his Gear Meat Company connections for 39 years. The success of what had begun as James Gear's private business had been facilitated by the purchase of large areas of Maori land directed by Native Land Court lawyer Walter Buller, an associate of Newman in the Wellington Philosophical Society. Buller and Newman saw eye to eye on many issues, with Newman defending Buller in the House of Representatives when politicians led by John McKenzie criticized the latter's purchase of the Horowhenua block. Their joint interests in the Gear Meat Company profited from the company's success in converting Maori land into Pakeha farms producing beef, mutton, and lamb which the company sold for handsome profits overseas. The Newman family eventually owned farms in Wellington, Hawke's Bay, the Wairarapa, and the southern Manawatu, and a successful thoroughbred stud.[27]

Newman's political career constitutes the second relevant context in which to situate 'A Study of the Causes'. He had been defeated in his attempt to gain the Foxton seat in the House of Representatives in the 1881 election. Perhaps 'A Study of the Causes', the argument of which relieved Pakeha of responsibility and guilt for Maori decline, was designed to appeal to Pakeha electors and politicians, and should be read as a campaign speech as well as a scientific lecture. It did not impair his political career. Wellingtonians elected him to parliament as member for Thorndon in 1884, and he became an almost permanent fixture in the House of Representatives until 1922.

'A Study of the Causes' might also be read as a religious text, a secular sermon, in which Newman, high priest of the 'church scientific', sought to relieve Pakeha souls by assuring his fellows that they bore no responsibility for Maori extinction.[28] The paper pronounced a general absolution on colonization.

One final context, however, throws new light on 'A Study of the Causes'. None of those historians who have quoted the paper have analysed how members of the Wellington Philosophical Society responded to it. In fact once again, as in 1876, they attacked Newman's views. Dr Morgan Grace, a trained physician, argued that Maori depopulation was occurring more slowly than Newman had suggested. Sceptical of the claim that the Maori must die out, Grace predicted that in fifty years' time the race would have grown larger than at present.[29]

Sir James Hector, manager of the New Zealand Institute and patriarch of colonial science, demolished Newman's arguments. Both Newman and Grace had underestimated the impact of epidemics of measles and other European

27 On the Gear Meat Company see Martin J.S. Nestor, 'The Gear Meat Co., its Origin and Growth', Acc. 91-256, MS 4719, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington (I would like to thank Shaun Broadly for this reference); on Walter Buller's relationship with James Gear see Ross Galbreath, *Walter Buller: The Reluctant Conservationist*, Wellington, 1989, pp.132-3; for Newman's support of Buller see NZPD, 1887, LIX, p.122.

28 T.H. Huxley, self-styled 'Pope' of a 'New Reformation', coined the term 'church scientific'.

29 For the arguments of Grace and Hector, and Newman's response, see TPNZI, 1881, XIV, pp.539-40 and *New Zealand Times*, 29 January 1882, p.3.

diseases on the Maori population, Hector argued, refusing to swallow Newman's tortuous attempt to explain them away. Even so, Maori were dying out neither as quickly nor as universally as Newman had suggested. Those living in or near large towns, exposed to Pakeha diseases and vice, may have been declining, but those in isolated areas were thriving. Hector knew of Maori in the King Country, he declared, who were raising 'large families' of perfectly 'healthy' children.

Hector also rejected Newman's claim that some mysterious 'inherent tendency to decay' operating prior to and independently of the European had doomed the Maori to extinction. On the contrary, Pakeha were 'really to blame' for Maori decline because in serving their 'own purposes' they had caused Maori to abandon their 'old habits and customs'. In particular they had 'undermined the authority of the chiefs', without establishing effective 'European authority' as a substitute. Hector could see 'no reason why the race should have decayed if it had been left alone, or gradually assimilated'. He had 'no use', he concluded, referring to Newman's paper, for attempts 'to excuse ourselves by any other natural law but that of might'. Hector, normally a reserved person, condemned 'A Study of the Causes' as a shoddy and spurious whitewash.

Newman had contravened the ethos of colonial science. The constitution of the New Zealand Society, parent of the Wellington Philosophical Society, stipulated as early as 1851 that 'politics and polemics' were 'totally inconsistent with the aims of a scientific society', and that any member guilty of introducing such topics was liable to expulsion.[30] This reflected the British origins of colonial science, where mainstream scientific institutions, ever since the establishment of the Royal Society of London in 1660, had attempted to avoid fruitless and divisive wrangling over politics and religion. Newman's polemical racism had placed him beyond the pale.

A sceptical reader, knowing that the Wellington Philosophical Society elected Newman president in 1885, might suggest that this undermines my argument that Newman had articulated extreme views in 1882. Surely members thereby endorsed his racist outlook? Not necessarily. An incident occurring in the Philosophical Institute of Canterbury also in 1882 illuminates this issue. In May of that year William Miles Maskell, a conservative Catholic entomologist, attempted to mobilize members of the institute over the issue of Charles Darwin's irreligion. F.W. Hutton, professor of biology at Canterbury College, summarily silenced this sectarian spectre by dismissing the meeting and sending members home.[31] Far from being ostracized by fellow men of science for his anti-evolutionism, Maskell served on the board of governors of the New Zealand Institute in 1885-6 and 1888-97, and became president of the Wellington Philosophical Society in 1888. We cannot for a minute assume that those who elected him to such offices agreed with Maskell's Catholic creationism — most of the Protestants, deists, and agnostics who made up the scientific community did not. Yet they were broad-minded, tolerant, and inclusive. We ought therefore

30 L. Bastings, 'History of the New Zealand Society 1851-1868', *Transactions of the Royal Society of New Zealand*, 1953, LXXX, pp.359-66.

31 *New Zealand Journal of Science*, 1888, I, p.188.

to avoid assuming that by electing Newman president of the Wellington Philosophical Society in 1885 members sanctioned the racial views expressed in 'A Study of the Causes'.

Historians have noted that Maori themselves did not passively swallow 'dying Maori' theories. Religious and political leaders such as Te Whiti, Te Kooti, and the Young Maori Party members worked in a variety of ways in the last third of the nineteenth century to assure their own future. James Carroll and other Maori politicians criticized the dying race idea in the House of Representatives in the early 1890s.[32] Te Rangi Hiroa (Peter Buck) gave it the *coup de grace* in the Auckland Institute in 1922.[33] Yet Grace and Hector illustrate that Pakeha too, contested dying Maori theories, especially when, as in Newman's case, they were formulated crudely and unconvincingly.

The position of Hector, whose influence within colonial science can scarcely be overestimated, must be understood. Two years later he 'entirely concurred' with Walter Buller's version of the dying Maori articulated in a presidential address to the Wellington Philosophical Society. How do we account for Hector's seemingly contradictory reactions? Two differences between Newman's and Buller's papers seem relevant. First, Newman had argued that Maori were dying out *before* the coming of the Pakeha, and had done so inconsistently, especially in respect of introduced European diseases. Buller avoided these errors. Second, Newman callously consigned the Maori to extinction, eschewing 'regret', omitting any humanitarian rhetoric. Buller, by contrast, appealed to the moral sentiments of his audience, calling on his colleagues to do their 'plain duty as good compassionate colonists', and to 'smooth down' the 'dying pillow' of the Maori.[34]

A critic might see Buller's romantic formulation of the dying Maori as more sinister and insidious than Newman's precisely because of its pious, humanitarian tone. Certainly, despite the above differences, the two theories shared common features. Both extrapolated from existing trends to predict Maori extinction with what must seem to modern eyes to be a disturbing confidence. Even on Buller's overly pessimistic estimate of 35,000 remaining Maori, the race was hardly on its last legs. It seems difficult to explain the attractions of the dying Maori theory except in terms of some degree of Pakeha wish-fulfilment.

Yet most nineteenth-century commentators, lacking the hindsight available to us, could hardly have known that the Maori population would hit bottom in the early 1890s and then begin to recover. And even Newman, that most tendentious of racists, did not construct his dying Maori theory entirely out of thin air. Ian Pool, the most reliable modern historical demographer of the Maori population, has confirmed what nineteenth-century observers knew — that the Maori population began steadily to decline after European contact in the late eighteenth

32 See for example *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives* (AJHR), 1891, G-1, pp.xxix-xxx.

33 Te Rangi Hiroa, 'The Passing of the Maori', TPNZI, 1924, LVII, pp. 362-75.

34 An abstract of Buller's presidential address followed by responses, including Hector's, appears in TPNZI, 1884, XVII, pp.443-6.

century largely because, being a 'virgin soil' population, they took time to acquire immunity to the diseases that accompanied the European influx. By the 1880s, when Newman and Buller made their predictions, the Maori population had been declining at between 10 and 15% per decade for about forty years. None of this justifies confident Pakeha predictions of Maori extinction. It does help explain why so many believed the race was dying out.

One final similarity between Newman's and Buller's papers is worth noting. Buller's dying Maori, too, met criticism. Three members of the House of Representatives — Waterhouse, Hart and Fraser — argued that Buller had exaggerated the extent of depopulation. Captain Fraser, for example, declared that 'the decay of the Maori people was by no means so rapid as was generally supposed'.[35]

Two years after 'A Study of the Causes' Newman entered parliament as member for Thorndon. Having closely examined both text and context of his 1882 paper, we might expect its author to articulate equally arrogant racial views in the House of Representatives. Did he argue that because the race was dying out, there was no point in advocating health education or medical care for Maori? Did he argue against equal civic rights for the doomed? How consistently did he carry into politics the racism of 1882?

Perhaps Hector's criticism of 'A Study of the Causes' had effected a change of heart. Contrary to my expectations on beginning this research, Newman avoided overt racism during his long political career. In an 1884 speech shortly after entering the House, for example, he declared that, though he believed it 'inevitable' that the race would disappear, the Pakeha's 'duty' consisted in doing what he could to 'stop the decay'. The government should have embarked on a health education programme amongst Maori years ago, Newman insisted, because 'if the race is to be preserved' then Maori required 'a knowledge of sanitary laws'. In 1886 he drew parliament's attention to the fact that Maori at Otaki were 'dying out in a shockingly rapid manner' and called for a doctor to visit the area once or twice every week. Noting in 1915 how effectively health education programmes and medical care had reversed Maori decline, he called the House to 'do more for the health of the Natives of the Cook Islands' and other island peoples.[36]

He called for legislative recognition of racial equality in 1884, insisting that the government must give Maori the same civic rights and responsibilities as Europeans: both races should enjoy full representation in the House of Representatives, and both should be equally liable to taxation. In 1894, introducing a bill to permit women to become members of parliament, he declared that not to include Maori women would be 'simply monstrous'. In 1895 he insisted that Maori had 'just as much right to aid' under Seddon's Old Age Pensions Bill as 'other people'.[37]

Newman criticized the operations of the Native Land Court as detrimental to

35 ibid., p.446.
36 NZPD, 1884, XXXVIII, pp.231-2; 1886, LVI, p.105; 1915, CLXXII, p.529.
37 ibid., 1884, XLVIII, p.591; 1894, LXXXVI, p.404; 1896, XCV, p.647.

Maori interests. 'Neither Europeans nor Maori have any respect' for the court, he declared in 1885. Three years later he argued that the court ought to sit where cases actually arose instead of, as at present, 'dragging the Natives about from place to place at a ruinous cost'. He criticized the expensive land surveys the court required, which sometimes cost almost as much as the land was worth, as needlessly impoverishing Maori. He condemned the 'scandalous' way in which Maori 'were being robbed of their lands' by half-castes and 'European agitators' who protracted cases in order to rip off Maori. In 1892 he suggested that the government, when negotiating to buy Maori land, should deal with tribes rather than, as at the time, individual owners.[38]

Interpreting this language is of course problematic. Talk was cheap, then as now. We might interpret it as mere rhetoric designed to confer a humanitarian veneer on an oppressive colonial system which was transferring land, money, and power from Maori to Pakeha hands, all the while reinforcing prosperous Newman's self-image as the virtuous champion of the poor and downtrodden. Maori leaders did not trust him. 'I do not look upon Dr Newman as an authority at all in Native matters', declared Hoani Taipua Te Puna-i-rangiriri of Ngati Raukawa, member of parliament for Western Maori between 1884 and 1893. Newman 'relegates us to the shades', said Te Rangi Hiroa in 1922, criticizing 'A Study of the Causes' as a Pakeha 'excuse'.[39]

Newman appears ultimately to have been a man on the make, an opportunist, a political chameleon prepared to adapt to his environment. To illustrate this point, we may note the volatility of his scientific views. In 1876, as we have seen, he depicted New Zealand as an unhealthy environment for British immigrants, and was severely criticized. In 1883, he reversed this position, telling the Wellington Philosophical Society that New Zealand constituted 'the healthiest country on the face of the globe'.[40]

Following Hector's condemnation of 'A Study of the Causes' Newman articulated more temperate racial views in both the Wellington Philosophical Society and the House of Representatives. His egalitarian rhetoric should not lead us to assume that he had abandoned his belief in Maori inferiority. Maori might be allowed to vote, stand for parliament, and receive old age pensions precisely because they did not threaten Pakeha hegemony. T.H. Huxley, who proclaimed himself a liberal, took a similar line, calling for the abolition of slavery and the removal of legal disabilities on blacks in a famous essay 'On the Negro's Place in Nature'. Yet even when all injustice had been removed, the black would never, in Huxley's view, 'compete successfully with his bigger-brained and smaller-jawed rival, in a contest which is to be carried on by thoughts and not by bites'.[41]

Newman's views on gender followed a similar pattern to his views on race. I

38 ibid., 1885, LIII, pp.360, 451; 1888, LXII, p.567; 1889, LXVI, pp.259-60; 1890, LXIX, p.462; 1892, LXXVIII, p.299. See also ibid., 1884, L, p.323.

39 ibid., 1892, LXXVIII, p.299; Te Rangi Hiroa, 'The Passing of the Maori', pp.362-4.

40 A.K. Newman, 'Is New Zealand a Healthy Country? — an Enquiry', TPNZI, 1882, XV, pp.493-510, p.510.

41 Quoted in Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, New York, 1981, p.73.

have found no evidence that he abandoned the belief expressed in 1879 that females, having smaller brains, ranked intellectually below males. We might assume that he epitomized the oppressive Victorian patriarch, wielding science to keep women in their place, opposing the campaign for women's rights. Once again, a more complex picture emerges. Newman believed that the most able and intelligent women should enjoy enlarged opportunities in the professions. He fought for the right of women to enter the medical profession while training in England in the early 1870s. Marriage to Octavia Featherston in 1879 may have reinforced but did not initiate his support for women's rights. He may well have believed that female doctors would be naturally useful in the gynaecological and obstetric fields. Huxley, who claimed to support the emancipation of women, was deeply ambivalent about their entry into science and medicine, sometimes campaigning behind the scenes to exclude them.[42]

In New Zealand in 1896 Newman argued that women were doing so well in the medical and other professions that they ought to be admitted into the legal profession as well, and be allowed to become justices of the peace. 'Women should have had their rights long ago', he declared during his first year in parliament. In 1894 and again the following year he introduced a bill allowing women to be elected to the House of Representatives, declaring it 'quite impossible for the House much longer to deny them the right to equal political privileges in all aspects with the men'. His support for female emancipation undoubtedly owed something to his belief in the moral and domestic genius of women. Newman hoped that the prohibition movement would benefit, and that the influence of 'thrifty' women used to managing households would improve the colony's financial management.[43]

How did Newman's career in science develop after the controversy over 'A Study of the Causes'? Later in 1882 he made an unsuccessful attempt to challenge James Hector's dominance of the New Zealand Institute by calling for the establishment of a New Zealand Association of Science modelled on the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Other, more reputable men of science, such as G.M. Thomson, F.W. Hutton, and J.T. Thomson, chafing under Hector, were also calling for reform at this time, but Newman's initiative came to nothing.[44]

His ambitions in science rebuffed, Newman poured his energies into business and politics from 1885 on. He took little further part in colonial science for almost two decades, returning to the Wellington Philosophical Society only in 1903 — it was probably no coincidence that James Hector left New Zealand for North America in that year. The handful of papers Newman read over the next few years consisted of careful descriptions of Maori cultural artifacts, and caused no

42 NZPD, 1887, LVII, p.242; for an illuminating discussion of Huxley's views on race and the 'woman question' see Evelleen Richards, 'Huxley and woman's place in science: The "woman" question and the control of Victorian anthropology', in James R. Moore, ed., *History, Humanity and Evolution: essays for John C. Greene*, Cambridge, 1989, pp.253-84.

43 NZPD, 1896, XCII, p.339; 1894, LXXXIII, p.404; 1895, LXXXVII, p.641.

44 A.K. Newman, 'A New Zealand Association of Science', *New Zealand Journal of Science*, 1882, I, pp.145-50.

controversy.[45]

He succumbed just once more to the allure of grand theory. Around the turn of the century he adopted the Aryan theory of Maori origins. The earliest unequivocal evidence for Newman's conversion appears no earlier than 1905.[46] Inspired by S. Percy Smith's *Hawaiki: the whence of the Maori*, published in 1898, Newman joined the Polynesian Society in 1907. He outlined his own views in *Who are the Maoris?* (1913), a three-hundred-page tome inspired, as always, 'only' by the desire 'to find out the truth'. In it he advanced characteristically immodest claims: to have established beyond doubt that Maori came from Northern India; to have 'conclusively proved the route of the Great Migration from the banks of the Indus to New Zealand'; and to have shown that the Maori constituted a mixture of Aryan and Mongolic races, with the Caucasian (Aryan) strain dominant.[47] Even Smith admitted that Newman had 'made some mistakes due to a want of a more complete knowledge of Polynesian traditions'.[48] The book did not advance its ever-ambitious author's reputation.

If Newman pursued a chequered career in science and scholarship, he made a more effective, and remarkably wide-ranging, contribution to the civic life of Wellington. He served on the Wellington City Council (1881-5), the education board, the Wellington College board of governors, the Wellington Special Settlement Association, the University Senate, the Wellington Hospital board of trustees, the Agricultural and Pastoral Association, and as mayor in 1909-10. He led the campaign to develop Anderson Park and advocated planting of Tinakori Hill.

He carried this environmental interest into national politics. He supported forest conservation, and helped lead the campaign to establish Tongariro National Park, believing that such 'natural curiosities should be the property of the colony for all time'. He saw money to be made as well as beauty to be appreciated in the colony's scenic wonders. Setting aside hot springs such as those at Tokaanu as national reserves, for example, would attract both fee-paying tourists and invalids.[49]

Passionate about sports and committed to the concept of a sound mind in a sound body, Newman served as vice-president of the Wellington Cricket Association, and supported tennis and athletics. He liked racing, owning a small thoroughbred stud, and served as steward and life member of the Wellington Racing Club. Rugby constituted the doctor's chief sporting passion. He became president of the Poneke Rugby Football Club (1886-1924), the Wellington Rugby Union (1904-24), and the New Zealand Rugby Union (1916), and was

45 A.K. Newman, 'Notes on Two Maori Calabashes, with Carved Wooden Necks called Tuki or Ko-ano-ano', TPNZI, 1903, XXXVI, pp.1-4; A.K. Newman, 'On Maori Dredges (Poukakahi and Hao)', TPNZI, 1904, XXXVII, pp.138-144; A.K. Newman, 'On the Musical Notes and Other Features of the Long Maori Trumpet', TPNZI, 1905, XXXVIII, pp.134-8.

46 Newman, 'On the Musical Notes', p.137.

47 A.K. Newman, *Who are the Maoris?*, Wellington, [1913?], pp.5-6, 301-3.

48 Quoted in M.P.K. Sorrenson, *Maori Origins and Migrations: The Genesis of Some Pakeha Myths and Legends*, Auckland, 1979, p.28.

49 NZPD, 1887, LVII, p.400; 1890, LXVIII, p.591; 1891, LXXII, p.401,

said to have done more than anyone else to make rugby the national game.[50]

During the 1918 influenza epidemic Newman took charge of a temporary hospital in Buckle Street, worked hard, and fell seriously ill. His health never recovered. He died of heart failure at the Wellington Club on 3 April 1924.[51]

I conclude by reflecting on a developing controversy. Revisionist historians such as Angela Ballara and James Belich, criticizing a tradition that saw benevolence, humanitarianism, and progress in New Zealand race relations, have recently emphasized the racism of Victorian Pakeha, arguing that it pervaded colonial culture, including science. Alan Ward, however, has insisted that official British policy, though ethnocentric, was not only 'not fundamentally racist' but 'in many respects the very antithesis of racism'.[52]

This study of Newman, the most overt scientific racist in the colony, which at first sight seems unequivocally to support the former view, ends up on closer examination more nearly confirming the latter. The doctor did not get away with the attempt to treat Maori as a depraved, doomed, sub-human Other. The fact that he felt obliged for the rest of his career to pay at least lip service to the belief that Maori were, and ought to be treated as, human beings suggests that such ideas still mattered, if not much to Newman himself, at least to the culture within which he operated.

Racism clearly existed within mainstream culture, and influenced science, as the popularity of the dying Maori theory suggests. Yet historians ought to assess the significance of scientific racism in Victorian culture with considerable sensitivity for the contexts in which such ideas operated. They do not appear, in late nineteenth-century New Zealand at least, to have eclipsed older traditions of racial equality and humanitarianism as completely as a contextless reading of 'A Study of the Causes' might lead us to believe.

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50 ibid.,1924, CCIII, pp.90-94.

51 Death Certificate: Alfred Newman (copy in author's possession).

52 Alan Ward, *A Show of Justice: Racial 'amalgamation' in nineteenth century New Zealand*, Auckland, 1995, p.viii.